



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Say Okay to Risky Play

Think back to your earliest childhood memories of playing. How old were you? Where were you? What were you doing? Most adults will say that they remember playing mostly outdoors climbing trees, swinging, playing tag and many other fun and spontaneous outdoor activities that involved a certain amount of risk.

Young children often engage in activities that may challenge them. This type of play is referred to as "Risky Play." Risky play is a thrilling and exciting activity that involves a risk of physical injury, and play that provides opportunities for challenge. Risky play is different than hazardous play. Understanding the benefits of risky play and allowing children in your care to engage in and benefit from this type of play takes careful planning and intentional thought.

Norwegian professor Ellen Sandseter developed "6 Categories of Risky Play" for children's play. They involve children seeking opportunities to:

- ♥ **Play at Heights:** Climb, jump off of, hang from and balance above heights.
- ♥ **Play at Rapid Speeds:** Run, swing, slide and cycle.
- ♥ **Dangerous Tools:** Use tools that could be potentially dangerous such as scissors, rope, hammers and nails, etc.
- ♥ **Dangerous Elements:** Engage in play near natural elements such as water and heat.
- ♥ **Rough and Tumble:** Play fight, wrestle, chase, or play fighting.
- ♥ **Disappearing or getting lost:** Play, hide and explore unfamiliar spaces either alone or in small groups.

You play an important role in creating an environment



that promotes risky play and ensuring the space is fun, challenging (risky) and safe for your child. This newsletter will define the 6 categories of risky play, describe how to support and encourage young children to engage in risky play and provide safety precautions.

This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Infants are learning about their bodies from birth. Reaching, grasping, and pulling up to stand are all ways that infants learn about what they are capable of. When your child pulls up on an object to stand and then stands on her own, that can be considered risky because she may fall. The key is to ensure that the environment around her is safe, such as providing soft flooring or mats, staying close enough to catch her if she begins to fall, and ensuring there is enough space for her to move around so when she begins to take those risks the likelihood of injury is less.

Here are some examples of infant play for each of the 6 categories of risky play:

- ♥ **Play at Heights:** When your child can hold her head up without support, you can do a lifting type activity such as laying on your back and lifting your child up in the air above you. Let her stay there for a brief time, then bring her back down. Repeat this as long as you see her enjoying it.
- ♥ **Play at Rapid Speeds:** When your child can sit on her own, make a box car by placing her in a box or laundry basket and propping her with a small pillow. You can gently push her around the room.



- ♥ **Dangerous Tools:** Pounding toys are a great way to start. For example, she may enjoy pounding on an empty oatmeal container with a wooden spoon.
- ♥ **Dangerous Elements:** Fill sheet pans with water for shallow water play to encourage her to touch and splash the water. All water play must be fully supervised.
- ♥ **Rough and Tumble:** Tickle your child gently, if she gets fussy, it's time to stop.
- ♥ **Disappearing or getting lost:** Peek-a-Boo is an example of this type of risky play. As she gets older, you can use a blanket to cover her and say "Hm...I wonder where you are?" When she takes the blanket off you can say "Oh, you were hiding!"

Activity for Infants: *Climb the Mountain*

What You Need:

- Pillows
- Cushions
- Soft flooring (e.g., cushioned mat, carpet or extra area rug)

What to Do:

1. Put the pillows and cushions in a pile on the soft flooring. The age of your infant will determine how high you make the pile. You can also make a pathway in the room with the pillows or cushions.
2. Encourage her to climb on and over the pile or pathway.
3. Ensure close supervision as she is climbing



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

Toddlers are constantly on the move and don't always know what they are doing is risky. It is important to stay close to your toddler as she plays so you can intervene if the play gets hazardous.

Here are some examples of toddler play for each of the 6 categories of risky play:

- ♥ **Play at Heights:** When walking with your toddler, encourage her to walk on the curb while you hold her hand. She may want to jump off the curb as well while holding your hand.
- ♥ **Play at Rapid Speeds:** Start with bucket seat swings and low slides with a support frame. You can also introduce tricycles and other small riding toys, or run with her down a low grassy hill.
- ♥ **Dangerous Tools:** With your supervision, introduce a butter knife using hand-over-hand guidance for her to cut soft fruit like a banana.
- ♥ **Dangerous Elements:** Being in the kitchen to do cooking activities are a way to expose your child to heat safely. She can watch from a safe distance as you put things in the oven or heat things on the stove. Involve your child by allowing her to assist with washing fruits and vegetables, stirring, and pouring (room



temperature) ingredients into a large bowl.

- ♥ **Rough and Tumble:** You can do this activity by chasing and rolling around on a soft surface with your child. Keep a close eye on her facial expressions, if she is smiling and laughing, she is playing. If you see frowning, fear or anger, it isn't play.
- ♥ **Disappearing or getting lost:** At a park, let her lead the way on a short walk around the area, making sure she is always visible to you.

Activity for Toddlers: *Getting Lost*

What You Need:

Table
Large sheets or blankets
Rug or carpet

What to Do:

1. Put the large sheet or blanket over the table to create a fort.
2. Place the rug or carpet under the table to make it more comfortable.
3. Play hide and seek with your toddler; you can say something like "I wonder where you are? You must be hiding somewhere."
4. After finding her, let her find other safe places to hide.
5. To extend this activity, put pillows and books in the fort and encourage her to go in and have some quiet time if she feels comfortable.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



Preschoolers

Preschoolers are constantly pushing the boundaries when it comes to challenging their capabilities and mastering their growing bodies. Because preschoolers move so much, it is important to create a play area with enough space for them to move their bodies without tripping or bumping into things. Soft carpeting inside or thick grass outside can provide padding if she falls during risky play. Talk to your child before play begins to ensure she is feeling safe and ready for the activities.

Here are some examples of preschooler play for each of the 6 categories of risky play:

- ♥ **Play at Heights:** Create a pathway on the floor with pillows or cushions and encourage your child to jump from cushion to cushion. Create on larger pile and hold her hand as she jumps off of the pile.
 - ♥ **Play at Rapid Speeds:** Climb up larger hills or slopes and run or roll down the grass.
 - ♥ **Dangerous Tools:** Introduce child-safe scissors for her to use, giving her guidance of how to use them as well as setting rules (e.g., We sit down when using scissors and only cut paper).
 - ♥ **Dangerous Elements:** Place small items inside of different size bowls, fill with water and freeze.
- After freezing, run it under water to thaw slightly, then empty the ice into a container and allow the child to dig or poke with sticks to discover the mystery inside.
 - ♥ **Rough and Tumble:** Provide a large, soft, safe surface like grass, mats or thick rugs. This play allows children to climb over each other, wrestle or roll around. Watch your child's facial cues to ensure she is safe and having fun.
 - ♥ **Disappearing or getting lost:** Help your preschooler create an alone area such as a fort that you make together or a separate space in the house. This gives her the feeling of disappearing, but everyone knows where she is, so she is safe.



Activity for Preschoolers: Use of Tools

What You Need:

- A small hammer or rubber mallet
- Golf tees
- Floral foam blocks, peg boards, or pool noodle

What to Do:

1. Talk to your child about the hammer and mallet and what it is used for. You could say "This is a hammer, we use it to fix things."
2. Place the object that she is hammering into in front of her. You can say "Today, we are going to use the hammer to pound the golf tees into the block/board."
3. Give her the hammer or mallet and the golf tees.
4. Encourage her to hit the golf tees into the object in front of her.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Learn through her senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Feel important and good about herself
- ♥ Develop her unique identity

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase her observation, listening and understanding skills and her attention span
- ♥ Connect words and sounds she hears with what she experiences

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Recognize math concepts (sequencing, patterning)



Kids in the Kitchen

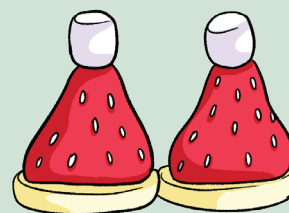
Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Santa Hats

Adapted from weelicious.com

Ingredients:

- 12 strawberries, washed stemmed and sliced flat
- 12 mini marshmallows
- 1 large banana, cut into 12 round slices
- Toothpicks



Directions:

1. Help your child use a plastic knife to cut the stem off the strawberries, creating a flat side.
2. Have her cut the banana into 12 round slices.
3. Use the toothpick to skewer through a slice of banana, then through the flat side of the strawberry.
4. Skewer the marshmallow on top of the strawberry.

Resources

10 Ways to Support Risky Play

<https://rustykeeler.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Rusty-Keeler-10-Ways-to-Support-Risky-Play.pdf>

Rusty Keeler, a play space designer for over 30 years developed 10 ways to support risky play.

Eliminate Barriers to Risk Taking in Outdoor Play

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/spring2023/risk-taking-outdoor-play>

Read a scenario of a 5-year-old boy who engages in risky play with the help of his teacher and the other children. Learn strategies for taking risky play outdoors.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

Look! Babies Head to Toe by Robie Harris

This board book is filled with pictures of babies doing all things that babies do. Introduce body parts and play!

One, Two, Three...Climb! by Carol Thompson

Toddlers love to climb. Explore the struggles and achievements as children learn to explore using their whole bodies.

Preschoolers

The Thing Lou Couldn't Do by Ashley Spire

This book about Lou, who has never climbed a tree. After trying to convince her friends why she can't join them, she tries it and is successful in her tree-climbing.

Let's Go to the Hardware Store by Anne Rockwell

This book is a great introduction to real tools as Dad takes the kids to the hardware store to fix things in the house, but don't forget the picture hangers.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii